

TT No. 150: *Mike Latham* - Saturday 30 January 2010: Scottish Premier League: **Kilmarnock 4-4 Dundee United**; Attendance: 4,587; Admission: £20; Programme: excellent, 52pp, £3.

It was a day when the groundhopping gods certainly played with the emotions before relenting late on and coming up trumps. They might even have been said to have looked down kindly upon me today after my folly at misreading the weather forecast.

After deciding on Friday evening not to venture north due to severe frost warnings, I made a schoolboy error and changed my mind. On Saturday morning, after walking the dogs around a frozen Rivington I was seduced by the tantalising prospect of action in the Scottish Junior Cup, a competition that interests me greatly.

After hearing that Annbank v Irvine Meadow (Scottish Junior Cup 4th round replay) had passed an inspection I headed north and picked up an eminent authority on Scottish football en route at Douglas just off J10 of the M74. We arrived in the remote Ayrshire village of Annbank just in time to find the tie had been called off around 25 minutes before kick-off despite the sun shining brightly from a cloudless sky. Several hundred followers of the junior game, most of them from Irvine were not amused. In the event the only junior game played in the area was down the coast at Girvan.

No bother, always have a back-up. Ayr United v Raith Rovers will definitely be on, we thought- and it was a game I was looking forward to immensely as I had only visited Somerset Park previously for an evening game and had failed to get any decent photographs of one of the most atmospheric grounds in Scotland. But just we arrived at Somerset Park just in time to wave goodbye to the visitors' team bus leaving on its journey back to Raith (sic).

Desperate times and any port in a storm- Killie it was, under-pitch heating and all. I'd been several times before but at least it was a game. The roads were quiet and the route into the Ayrshire town was straightforward with plenty of parking options around the Rugby Park ground, which is situated in a decent residential area just outside the main centre.

It was £20 pay at the turnstiles for a seat in the main stand, and £3 for an excellent programme. The sun was shining and there was a chance to sample the famous Killie pie once again. Things could have been worse. These days I am phlegmatic if the weather intervenes and am just grateful to get in a game. There were less than 5,000 in attendance for a game between the home side, second from bottom with new manager Jimmy Calderwood in charge against third-placed Dundee United but the ones that turned up were certainly committed.

The locals were friendly and the view from the main stand was excellent. There is a nice feel to a ground that has been sympathetically renovated without losing its charm. And the game was just fantastic with both sides committed to attack and the players committed to a high tempo. It was a manager's nightmare nonetheless, with some defensive howlers (the visitors conceding three goals from corners) but great entertainment. Killie, 3-1 down after 33 minutes led 4-3 after 63 minutes but Daly's penalty two minutes later levelled matters and there it stayed. All the players gave everything, the result just about fair enough and as the light faded and the frost returned, we headed homewards.

It was not the best journey home in freezing temperatures with snow showers in part but at least we had seen a game and one that would linger in the memory. The SPL gets plenty of criticism but this was a terrific spectacle and it was hard to find fault. The Crown in Horwich was still open for business as I reached home and the mild tasted like nectar. After such unpromising beginnings it was the best game, I've seen all season and there's still the prospect of seeing Annbank v Irvine Meadow next Saturday.

06/20